

Role Model Effect and Girls of Color:
Building the Next Generation of Leaders

Research Thesis

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by

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Abstract

In this research project, I examine the significance of diversity in role models for girls of color. This research looks at the relationship between role models and girls of color. The phrase girls of color refers to any girl who identifies racially beyond the category of white. Existing research chronicling young girls' experiences focuses largely on girls who are white, middle class, and suburban. This is not always explicitly mentioned, but a lack of intersectionality in the data about young girls and role model behaviors suggest that all girls share similar experiences and share similar reactions to role models regardless of race and gender. I argue that the presence of role models that align closely with girls' own identities matters for creating possibilities for leadership in their own lives. I argue that shared demographic markers are essential in the selection process for girls of color. I also explore the question of social distance. Do girls of color need to interact face to face with role models to find that they positively impact their lives? "You can't be what you can't see" is a common phrase used when talking about role models and young girls. Several after school programs push this narrative relating solely to gender, but I argue that it has implications for race as well. In working with Dr. Wendy Smooth and Dr. Elaine Richardson on their research project entitled, "Girls of Color as Social Change Agents," I am able to draw upon data from focus groups with girls of color ages 8-14 years of age from across the city of Columbus. I utilize the words of girls of color to build an understanding of their attitudes on role models in developing their leadership behaviors. Focusing on the next generation of leaders has always been a priority, but I intend to find ways to make it so that young women of color will have those same leadership foundations that set them up for a successful future.

Introduction

During my sophomore year of college, I began working with a non-profit aimed at empowering girls, specifically middle school girls in lower income areas in Columbus. The curriculum focused on five core skills: public speaking, problem solving, critical thinking, goal setting, and conflict resolution. Though there rarely was a day where we stuck to the curriculum. The girls had social awareness well past their years. Discussion topics ranged from police violence, to poverty cycles, to the differences race made for both teachers and students in the realm of instruction.

These conversations brought to light the ineffectiveness of the programming I was tasked with using for the group. The subject of this thesis is Girls of Color and Role Models. This topic is important for the reason I have listed above. Current leadership programming is not addressing the needs of girls of color.. And the research surrounding leadership does not place an emphasis on girls of color. If a section about girls of color is included at all, it is very small and often the research references resilience and survival of girls of color and not about their ability to become great leaders. Girls of color and role model effect is something I believe makes the most sense to study right now. Research shows that if we can narrow down what girls of color need in regards to role models their self-efficacy, performance in school, and their overall wellbeing is improved. (Zirkel, 2002)

This research is rooted in community. There needs to be a greater connection from community to research. Theoretically, there are ways in which role models should be affecting girls of color. This can be traced to the literature and work already being

done in the field. But, are girls receiving this message and how do they feel about it? This is where listening to community matters. We cannot take strictly data from communities and expect to have comprehensive solutions to the problems at hand. Listening to people who are experiencing the girlhood that we write about it crucial. In addition, I believe that this connection was lost in the original afterschool programming I was given. This research to community connection is crucial in finding out how to build a next generation of leaders that includes all girls.

Literature Review

Girls of Color

In order to focus the research question on girls of color we first need to figure out what it means to be a girl of color. A definition that is widely accepted in the literature is any girl that identifies outside of the category of white. (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, Nakkula, 2016) This includes native populations, Black, Latina, Asian, and any other community that is not under the umbrella of white. This is a large group, so encompassing all of the identities underneath requires an understanding of intersectionality. In “Intersectionality: Key Concepts” (2006), Hill Collins and Bilge stress that in order to understand social inequality, we cannot view only one portion of a person’s identity. In the context of this research, it would mean that we would only look at girls of color by their gender or their race, not how both of those interact. The Collins and Bilge reading goes through a brief history of using intersectionality as an analytical tool. (Collins & Bilge, 2016) intersectionality is also a focus of “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity

Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”. (2005) Crenshaw, much like Hill Collins and Bilge, demonstrates that intersectionality is necessary to do any type of analysis on girls of color and their experiences. She highlights the racist and sexist notions that women of color face when navigating identity politics. These two readings provide a basis for studies on women of color and therefore inform my research on girls of color. (Crenshaw, 2005)

“The personal is political” was a rallying cry during the second wave of feminism. White women at the forefront of the Women’s Rights movements used their shared experiences (discovered in consciousness raisings) to unify against issues that they believed were detrimental to women. But, as the authors of the “Combahee River Collective Statement” (1977) note, those issues did not include the issues that black women and other women of color faced. Unless movements were anti-racist, feminist, and socialist, the authors did not feel that they would guarantee the liberation of black women. This is an important article because it lays out the basis for using intersectionality as an analytical tool.

Black girls are treated differently in educational settings. In the article, “Ladies or Loudies?” (2007), Morris tells of his experience observing in a middle school. He demonstrates that black girls are treated differently and punished differently, compared to boys and girls of any other ethnicity. This, Morris says, impacts their overall experience. Qualities like challenging authority were reprimanded when a black girl was the subject, but not when a white boy was the subject challenging the authority. This article touches

on identity and intersectionality and is useful when referencing educational inequality for girls of color. (Morris, 2007)

bell hooks' *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1986) talks about how white feminism, or mainstream feminism, is ineffective at addressing the needs of all women. In fact, as Bell Hooks points out in the reading, the problems that are addressed primarily affect white middle/upper class women. hooks encourages an understanding to not paint each girl/woman's experience as the same. Bell hooks illustrates that black women and women of color in general do not need to view all forms of oppression through the patriarchal lens, and instead can experience oppression outside of that. (bell hooks, 1986)

Thornton Dill, in "Race, Class and Gender: Prospects for an all-Inclusive Sisterhood" (1983), presents this same phenomenon. She calls for the reveal of the limitations of sisterhood. She asserts that white feminists have the dominant narrative, and are often not thinking of women of color, working women, non-able bodied women, etc. when forming those "sisterhoods". Both of these articles stress the importance of studying with an intersectional lens, and not just following dominant narratives about feminism/inclusive spaces. (Thornton Dill, 1983)

Continuing to look at this issue through an intersectional lens, it is important that girlhood is recognized as racialized for young girls of color. In "Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship", Cox highlights the importance of black girlhood specifically and how it informs the experience of the girls who are living in the homeless shelter. The study in the book is of girls ages 15-22, and it asks them directly

about questions related to combating the racism/sexism that they experience. The largest takeaway from this book is that the study of girlhood for girls of color cannot be understood if we do not say it is racialized. Girls of color automatically have different scripts written about their body and behavior than boys of color. These scripts written about girls of color and their behaviors are also not the same for white girls (Cox, 2015).

Cox establishes that girlhood is racialized and Brown's work expands upon that same idea. One of the storylines that is often ascribed to girls of color is the "resiliency" storyline. This is not to say that we should not celebrate, but it should not be the default for girls of color, yet often times it becomes that. (Brown, 2013) In this book Brown explores how a program focused on creativity can harness the potential of girls of color and also inspire the women of color leading the sessions. This recognition of the diversity of experiences for girls of color is one of the main pulls from "Hear Our Truths". Also the positive effect that the leaders of the group experience seeks to inform us about the mutually beneficial relationship that being a role model to a girl of color can unlock. (Brown, 2013)

Girls of color face barriers that threaten to keep them from educational opportunities. This is outlined in the book by Monique Morris, "Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools". Morris outlines the ways in which the perceptions that grown adults have about girls of color often paint them as aggressive and unable to be taught. Morris starts the book by highlighting arrests of teen girls (sometimes even younger) and the unlawful nature of these arrests and the importance of

the location in which they happen, school. The bossy narrative was talked about when I worked in the afterschool program that brought me to think about this research question. Girls would often talk about scenarios that relate to scenes in this book. Girlhood for girls of color means navigating this preexisting idea that their actions are aggressive and disruptive. This book serves to outline the lack of resources we have in schools that prevent such racialized responses to girls of color and their decision-making. (Morris, 2016)

Girls and Leadership

Since its founding in 1912, Girl Scouts of America has distinguished itself as the premiere organization for promoting girls' leadership development. The organization known for its cookies also has its hand in research regarding girl's leadership. The "Girl Scout Impact Study" (2017) has seven findings about girls who are scouts versus girls who are non-scouts. They look at dimensions of leadership around sense of self, positive values, challenge seeking, healthy relationships, and community problem solving. This report also mentions school performance, the willingness to participate in after-school activities that center around learning, and how their program helps through "turbulent teen years". (Girl Scout Research Institute [GSRI], 2017) All of this creates excellent data on leadership and girls. It provides a broad definition of leadership and has a multifaceted approach to the teaching of skills. The Girl Scout Research institute also released a Leadership Guide in partnership with Disney Channel. (GSRI, 2016) While there is not hard evidence like the Impact Study, this guide gives age appropriate instruction on leadership development at each age. It is helpful to look at the dimensions

of leadership they include to build an understanding of girl's leadership at different age groups. Similar to the Leadership Guide, Girl Scouts also have the "Lifetime of Leadership" Guide. (GSRI, 2014) This document outlines the G.I.R.L. acronym (Go-getter, Innovator, Risk-taker, Leader) and shows the pillars of the Girl Scout program. As the leading program for girls in the country, it is important to understand how they have such great success and reach so many people.

Girls' leadership is often equated with empowerment. Leadership programs focus on empowerment. Giving girls the authority to take on leadership within their schools, families, and communities is an important aspect of leadership. The "Oral History and "Girls' Voices": The Young Women's Studies Club as a Site of Empowerment" (2011) article chronicles a club started at Hoover High School in San Diego. The researchers talked with eight girls involved in the Young Women's Studies Club. This type of qualitative research is important because it can speak to girls' leadership from a personal storytelling perspective. This article is also important because it mentions a good bit about intersectionality. The socioeconomic status of the girls is discussed in this club, LGBT issues are discussed in this club, and there is a large amount about the racial and ethnic identities of the girls and how they interact with that. (Cayleff, Herron, Cormier, Wheeler, Chavez-Arteaga, Spain, Doninguez, 2011)

Research that covers both leadership and gender often mentions the stereotypes that we have about leaders and how that can be gendered. For example, leadership qualities attributed to men often involve hierarchy and being the boss, while leadership

qualities attributed to women are often collaborative in nature. (Eagly & Carli, 2007) In the “Stumping to Girls through Pop Culture: Feminist Interventions to Shape Future Political Leaders” (Zaslow & Schoenberg, 2012), both Zaslow and Schoenberg examine what type of leadership girls are attracted to and what girls see as barriers to getting to be the leader they aspire to be. They do this by studying five elements of pop culture, but before they do that they map out different aspects of leadership like aspirations, persistent stereotypes, and representation. This article highlights that recruitment, more often than their own ideas, are why girls are getting involved in politics. This leads us to a third section of research that we need to gather information on, role models and girls.

Girls and Role Models

The role model effect on young women and girls is studied largely through the lens of political participation and leadership. Wolbrecht and Campbell talk about the role model effect of female members of parliament in the “Leading by Example: Female Members of Parliament as Political Role Models” (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007) article. They find that girls and women of all ages talk more about politics when there are more women serving in government, but this trend is particularly strong when it comes to young women. Young women are more likely to declare intent to be politically active when they are older. This article suggests this is because of the role model effect that women in politics create. As the title would suggest, they found that women are leading by example.

“Men and boys need little additional evidence that the halls of power are open to them”. (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2006) Campbell and Wolbrecht write about role models as they are related to female politicians. “See Jane Run: Women Politicians as Role Model for Adolescents” (2006) suggests that other studies only measure role model effect with higher offices in politics. Campbell and Wolbrecht highlight that having political engaged role models at home is of great importance and that other research underscores that to a degree. This article also states that the amount of conversations surrounding girls’ potential to someday be political leaders increase as the press increases its coverage of women in politics.

Wolbrecht and Campbell in “Role Models Revisited: Youth, Novelty, and the Impact of Female Candidates” (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2017) talk about novelty as it applies to female role models in politics. The authors discuss how political systems with more women are more likely to be viewed as, “open, fair, and deserving of trust.” A large take-away from this article is that the novelty of the role model plays a large part in how much the leader is discussed by young girls. This gives us a good indication of the types of role models girls will respond well to.

Also related to role models and politics, “See Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Sarah Palin Run? Party, Ideology, and the Influence of Female Role Models on Young Women” (Mariani, Marshall, Mathews-Schultz, 2015) covers the importance of party to role model effect in politics. This is pertinent to girls of color and role models because it is evidence that different aspects of identity can alter how girls see leaders. For example,

in the article, the researchers highlight that leaders like Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton show no evidence of affecting girls who are republican or conservative. If political party congruence is an aspect of role model behavior that is needed to increase involvement for all girls, there also must be a correlation between race/ethnicity and the leaders that girls see.

Role models are not limited to people that are famous. In fact, in a survey conducted by Anderson and Cavallaro, over 65 percent of respondents named people they know as role models rather than a person they did not know. This article stresses the importance of “seeing oneself” in the role model they choose to emulate. This study has data on the race/ethnicity congruence as well as the gender congruence of role models. This study in “Parents or Pop Culture? Children’s Heros and Role Models” (Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002) is one of the only pieces of research that does this kind of break down, (even highlighting Asian and Latino populations) but it is not gender specific. This article most closely aligns with what this paper will seek to answer about role model behavior.

Girls of color can see their role models in people in their community, and they can see their role models as celebrities. Beyoncé’s fame is almost unmatched in the world today. Her role as a black woman in this world places her at the forefront of girls’ minds when they think of a feminist they know in their life. After her 2013 album release, this feminist identity was solidified. Utley writes about the importance of Beyoncé to young girls. (Utley, 2017) Her findings suggest that although young girls definitely associate Beyoncé with feminism, they do not see her as a role model. Beyoncé’s behavior can be

seen as inappropriate to some audiences. Therefore respectability politics play a role in the minds of young girls of color. The question that Utley asks at the end speaks to my research question as well. “Perhaps, the question scholars should be asking of youth about popular culture icons is not who is a feminist, but who is a role model for which populations and why.” (Utley, 2017)

The environment in which a person grows up can also have a large effect on how they seek out role models. In a study by Oberle, Stowers and Falk a group of high school students with different racial identity and living situations (rural vs. urban) were surveyed about their role model preferences. The study found that rural and urban populations, as well as black and white populations had very different preferences when it comes to role models. Specifically, the evidence uncovered by Oberle et al. states that rural populations are more likely than urban populations to pick role models that are “glamour” role models. This is to say that they see these role models in the media or that they learn about them in history books. Conversely, urban populations are more likely to name someone in their community as a role model; this includes the naming of age similar peers. Oberle et al. conclude that this is because rural populations are unable to interact with those outside of their demographic and intermediate family, so those bonds may not be viewed in a mentorship type context. This evidence is important because it shows a consideration for identity and role model behavior. (Oberle, Stowers and Falk, 1978)

Girls of Color and Role Models

The importance of the intersection of race and class cannot be overlooked when discussing the topic of role models for young girls. Evidence shows that there is a correlation between academic success and race/gender matched role models. (Zirkel, 2002) Zirkel asserts that role models go beyond the notion that seeing a woman of color as a lawyer only inspires the young girl of color to be a lawyer. Instead Zirkel says that this role model (the woman of color lawyer) opens doors in the young girl's mind that show that she can do a myriad of things. This article also touches on the desirability of role models. Zirkel says that beyond identity qualities like intelligence, confidence, and success play into the role model effect for girls and specifically girls of color. The article does a good job of talking about role model pairings with shared gender and race characteristics, but goes into little detail about girls of color specifically.

In "Towards a Model of Positive Youth Development Specific to Girls of Color: Perspectives on Development, Resilience, and Empowerment", (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016) the authors tackle the question of how to take theoretical concepts about girls of color and education and apply them to positive youth development. One of the implications that the article makes is that girls who have the support of other girls are more likely to explore their identity. This relates to role models because it is often times where girls see one another as a role model, especially within groups of girls who all share similar backgrounds/experiences. This article addresses the need for change when studying girls of color as well. It call for researchers to "stray from damage-centered research and to amplify girls' of color voices and stories of complexity, contradiction, and self-determination." (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016)

Research Question

In this research project, I examine the significance of diversity in role models for girls of color. A lack of intersectionality in the data about young girls and role model behaviors suggests that all girls share similar experiences and share similar reactions to role models regardless of race and gender. I argue that girls seek out role models that align closely with girls' own demographic markers. And this feeling about the leaders in their lives can translate into behavior. This behavior is what makes role models matter for creating possibilities for leadership in their own lives. "You can't be what you can't see" is a common phrase used when talking about role models and young girls. Several after school programs push this narrative relating solely to gender, but I argue that it has implications for race as well.

What effect will leaders that share demographic identity markers have on their thoughts? I utilize the words of girls of color to build an understanding of their attitudes on role models in developing their leadership behaviors. Focusing on the next generation of leaders has always been a priority, but I intend to find ways to make it so that young women of color will have those same leadership foundations that set them up for a successful future. I predict that identity matters when girls think about their role models. How will they respond to leaders who share those identity demographic markers? I predict that race and gender will be the two identities that the girls will desire congruence with in order to see someone as a role model to them. A second research question relates

to the social distance of the role models. Does social distance, in this case celebrity vs. community, matter in the role models that resonate with girls of color in their lives? Do these girls need face-to-face time with role models in order to see them as viable candidates for emulating leadership in their own lives?

Methodology

For my research, I analyzed data from a larger project. I utilize Dr. Wendy Smooth's and Dr. Elaine Richardson's research project entitled, "Girls of Color as Social Change Agents: Identify Pathways to Leadership". The overall objective is to, "identify how girls of color understand their potential and capacities to assume roles as elected officials and grassroots community leaders". (Smooth, Richardson 2017) I will give a brief overview of the larger study and then highlight the portions of the study that I derived data from.

We conducted a series of focus groups in the summer of 2017. The community partner for the project was the Boys and Girls Club of Columbus Ohio. The sessions were approximately an hour and a half long and included questions on, "political efficacy, empowerment, leadership, and social change role models as well as their own sense of their potential to become agents of social change through civic and/or formal political leadership." (Smooth, Richardson 2017) The reason that this study of girls of color and their political efficacy was so important is because of the unique political climate in which we are living. With the presidential terms of Barack Obama and the nomination of

Hillary Clinton as the democratic candidate for the 2016 election, girls could see leaders that have some of the same demographic markers that they do.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Columbus are made up of approximately 75 percent racial and ethnic minorities. (BGCC 2015) They have programming for girls and boys of all ages, but the project focused on girls of color ages 8-14. I will be analyzing data taken from 4 out of the 6 focus groups. In this project, I analyze data from notes taken during the focus groups by a research assistant on a large paper post it that was available for the girls to view during their discussions. I also draw from the transcripts of the video recording taken at the focus groups. Finally, I draw data from the journal entries girls wrote at the closing of the focus groups, but before they were dismissed to return to their usual programming.

I utilize data from three discussions from the focus groups. The first question I utilized was the introduction question. Dr. Smooth asks the group to introduce themselves and say the name of a leader. This question became the key source of analysis for my questions regarding social distance. Second, I use the girls' responses to the question asked about the words that come to mind when they think of leadership. The context of this question is that it is situated just after they describe what they think it means to be a girl of color. This is important to note because in the data from this question, I can compare and contrast those words that they associate with leadership with how they see girls of color.

A third location I analyze data from the discussions that focus on four leaders in particular. The first of which is Marley. Marley is notable for collecting 1000 books about black girls. The girls are educated about Marley's project by watching a short interview with Marley and Charlie Rose. The girls respond to the question of, "How does Marley make you feel?" (Smooth, Richardson 2017) This question of, "How does _____ make you feel?" is echoed for the other three leaders as well. After the portion of the script that talks about Marley, we used a clip that highlights the three leaders of the #BlackLivesMatter leaders. After this clip, we played the girls are asked if they knew that Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patricia Cullors were the founders of #BlackLivesMatter and how those women made them feel. The last section of the script is titled "Political Leadership". In this section we asked the girls how the last two leaders (Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton) make them feel. We asked the girls about President Obama first because he appears in the #BlackLivesMatter video and then the script asks them if they know who ran for president during the 2016 election. The girls described how the two leaders made them feel and then the script was concluded. The decision to focus on feeling comes from the belief that feelings have an effect on the way girls of color select role models. Positive associations are vital to have role models that girls can resonate with. (Wolbrecht, 2007)

Finally, I analyzed the notes that the research assistant took recording girls' deliberations to discuss the leaders which allows us to draw on the specific words the girls used during the focus groups. These words/notes were very visible to the girls while they were discussing. Information taken from this portion of the data includes words used

to describe the four leaders that are highlighted (Clinton, BLM, Marley, Obama) as well as words that the girls used to describe girls of color. The data on words for girls of color will be used to show that girls of color think of themselves as leaders already. Or at least they see leadership qualities in themselves.

As I mentioned above, I will also be using the journal entries of the girls from the four focus groups. The girls were asked to write in these journals at the end of the script. The following tasks were written about in the journals; write about something that makes you so angry that you would sacrifice your time and energy to change it, what would you do, and who inspires you to lead. (Smooth, Richardson 2017)

Research Findings

Social Distance as a Marker for Role Models

In order to answer the question of, “Does social distance, in this case celebrity vs. community, matter in regards to who girls of color see as possible role models in their lives?” I analyzed 102 responses that were collected from the journal entries and taken from the introductory question of the script. Members of the girls’ community were mentioned 55.88% of the time. In the appendix it is shown that celebrity/historical figures were mentioned 44.12% of the time. This data tells us that there is an even distribution of celebrity vs. community.

The girls mentioned leaders that exist in their community 57 times. Of those 57, 23 of the responses were “Mom” and 9 were “Dad”. These two answers were the most popular among responses on community leaders. Other responses in this category included; sibling, me, my cousin, grandma, my doctor, family, parents, boy friend, and friends. These responses are important because they show how important role models that are seemingly everyday people, can be seen as leaders to these girls. The literature surrounding girls and role models stresses political figures and music stars, but there is a notable amount of girls that did not mention anyone outside of their community.

Celebrity/historical figures were mentioned in 44.12% of the responses. The answers with the highest frequency were “Rosa Parks” (12 responses) and “Martin Luther King Jr.”. (7 responses) It is noteworthy that both of these figures are historic icons. These narratives about Rosa Parks and MLK Jr. are taught every year during history lessons in Elementary/middle School. Both Parks and MLK get a lot of emphasis from classroom instruction. This could be part of the reason that the girls mentioned them so frequently.

There were other answers with the celebrity/historical tag on them. They are outlined in the Appendix. It is important to note that out of the 21 different leaders mentioned in this section that 13 out of 21 were historical figures. This finding speaks to the kinds of role models we present to girls of color. The next observation is that of the 21 different leaders mentioned, 14 of them were/are women. This speaks to the importance of gender agreement when it comes to who girls of color want to see as role

models. Related to sharing demographic markers, out of those 21 leaders, 15 of them are people of color. This is another important finding to answer the question of how these role models/leaders are selected by girls of color.

Shared Demographic Markers

In order to answer the question of, “What effects will leaders that share demographic markers have on the thoughts of girls of color?” I analyzed the words that came up when the girls were asked how a specific leader made them feel. All four of the leaders received overwhelmingly positive responses into how they made the girls feel. Not once did the girls to describe these four leaders using a negative word. I argue that this answers partially my question about how girls of color will respond to leaders who share demographic markers. The answer it gives is that girls feel positive emotions when they are asked about their associations with leaders like them.

Why does it matter what girls “feel” about certain leaders? Because feelings about leaders can translate into behavior emulation and on the most basic level allows for those leaders to hold positive associations in a girl’s mind. The decision to focus on how leaders made the girls feel as opposed to the words girls use to describe the leaders was purposeful. A leader, for example Barack Obama, can be as intelligent and powerful as he wants, but unless that triggers the positive feelings of a girl in the focus group, his leadership won’t mean anything more to them.

The first leader that they were asked about was Marley, the leader of the #1000BlackGirlBooks project. When asked how Marley made the girls feel they answered with these words; great, good, confident, happy, and proud. The most popular words for Marley were happy/proud. Marley was included in the original script because she was a young girl of color who had taken on a large project and was a leader. The reason her data was important to my thesis is because she shares three identity markers with these girls that we had in the focus groups. The markers she shares are age, gender, and racial/ethnic identity.

The second group of leaders that were talked about were the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrice Cullors were the three women who the girls got to see leading this national movement in the video clip from Black Girls Rock. (a BET segment) When the girls were asked how these women made them feel, they responded with; happy, positive, calm, encouraged, amazing, confident, and extreme. The women of #BLM elicited positive feelings with these girls. This was interesting because the media often portrays the Black Lives Matter movement as a movement that is divisive in nature. These women shared two demographic markers with the girls and those are race/ethnicity and gender. The answer with the most frequency was “happy”. One of the words that stood out to me when analyzing the data is “extreme” there is a way in which this can be read as negative, but in the context that the response was given, the girl mentions it in conjunction with confidence and the ability to be who you are. This recognition that extreme can be a positive response to leadership allows us to broaden, even further, the definition we have for role models and young girls of color.

The third leader that the girls are asked about is President Barack Obama. Obama appears in the video clip they are shown about Black Lives Matter. It is a snippet of the speech he made about Trayvon Martin. When asked about the former president, the girls said that he made them feel; good, encouraged, excited, safe, proud and intelligent. The word that they used the most is good. But, I think an important word that the girls used to describe Obama was “safe”. With Obama in office the girls felt that they were safe. In the focus groups this often prompted conversation that was off script that pertained to the current man holding the office of president, Donald Trump. This conversation often centered on them not feeling safe. Obama shares the racial/ethnic demographic marker with the girls. When they see a black person in the highest office they relate that to being safe, being encouraged, and being proud.

The final leader that the girls in the focus groups were asked about was Hillary Clinton. The way that Clinton was brought up to the focus groups was in the context of the 2016 election. The girls used the words good, excited, proud, and happy to describe the way Clinton made them feel. Hillary Clinton is a woman, so that is what her shared demographic is with the girls in the focus groups. It is also interesting to hear what they had to say about Hillary Clinton because of her pervasiveness in the media this past year. Going into the study I would have predicted that the negative rhetoric that the media had at times would have influenced the answers that the girls gave.

Girls of color see themselves as having leadership characteristics. This statement is supported by data from the notes taken by a research assistant during the focus groups. Words that the girls used to describe the category of “girls of color” include; leader, confident, smart, determined, brave, unique, and trueness. The words that were used multiple times include smart, brave, and leader. This data is important because it shows us that there is something in these girls lives that is causing them to think this way about themselves.

Conclusion/Discussion

Girls of color identify leaders in their communities, they identify leaders from history, and they identify leaders who are celebrities. The data indicates are evenly split between celebrity/historical figures and community figures. This is important because in the literature there is a large focus on which celebrities girls are emulating. Are we presenting the kinds of role models that girls of color see themselves in? While the Beyoncés of the world are certainly viewed as leaders in the minds of some girls, the girls that we interviewed also see those leadership possibilities close to home. In fact, there is data that shows us that mom and dad were among the three most popular responses from girls in the focus groups when they were asked to name a leader. The girls have a connection to community and the networks that they are involved in every day. Making sure they can identify the same leadership qualities in their community leaders that they do in more popular representations of leadership (like Barack Obama) will be integral if we want girls of color to see themselves as leaders.

Girls of color see leaders historically. This is not necessarily a problem. It is important to recognize the contributions that historical figures like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. made, but it cannot be the only leaders that girls are educated about. There is a possibility that girls are told about so many leaders in history that are white and male that when they do see leaders that share demographic markers (like Parks and King) that they hold onto those. Further research could explore the ways in which girls of color feel about their history curriculum. Are they seeing themselves being taught in the classroom? Are lessons about women and people of color isolated to certain times of the year? (Black History month, international women's day, etc.) Another question worth pursuing is the question of, do girls of color know about leaders who are in the world today? Examples like Kamala Harris come to mind. Asking girls if they resonate with leaders like her, or if they even know about her would bring to light the influence leaders like Harris have as role models.

The identity of the role model matters to girls of color. This is evident by looking at the data where we see shared demographic markers. Of the leaders mentioned ~69% of responses were women and ~85% were racial/ethnic minorities. This means that despite the pervasive imagery of white males as leaders, these girls seek out and identify people like them as leaders. To answer one of my research questions, "how will girls of color respond to leaders that share demographic markers?" Girls of color will respond positively. They will seek out leaders that share these identities and they will admire

them. The analysis that I conducted explore race and gender but further research could explore other intersections and shared demographic markers like class or religion.

The shared demographic markers matter to girls of color in who they chose for leaders. But, what if the leaders are chosen for them? Will they respond positively to leaders with shared demographic markers? The data shows us the overwhelmingly positive response that girls of color had to Marley (#1000BlackGirlBooks), the leaders of Black Lives Matter, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton. Responses in the focus group indicated that those leaders made the girls feel proud, happy, great, and intelligent. “You can’t be what you can’t see” may not be the most accurate representation of the way girls of color view role models. It may be more accurate to say, “you can be who you can see” the shift from restriction to possibility mirrors the way that girls of color seek out role models that look like them.

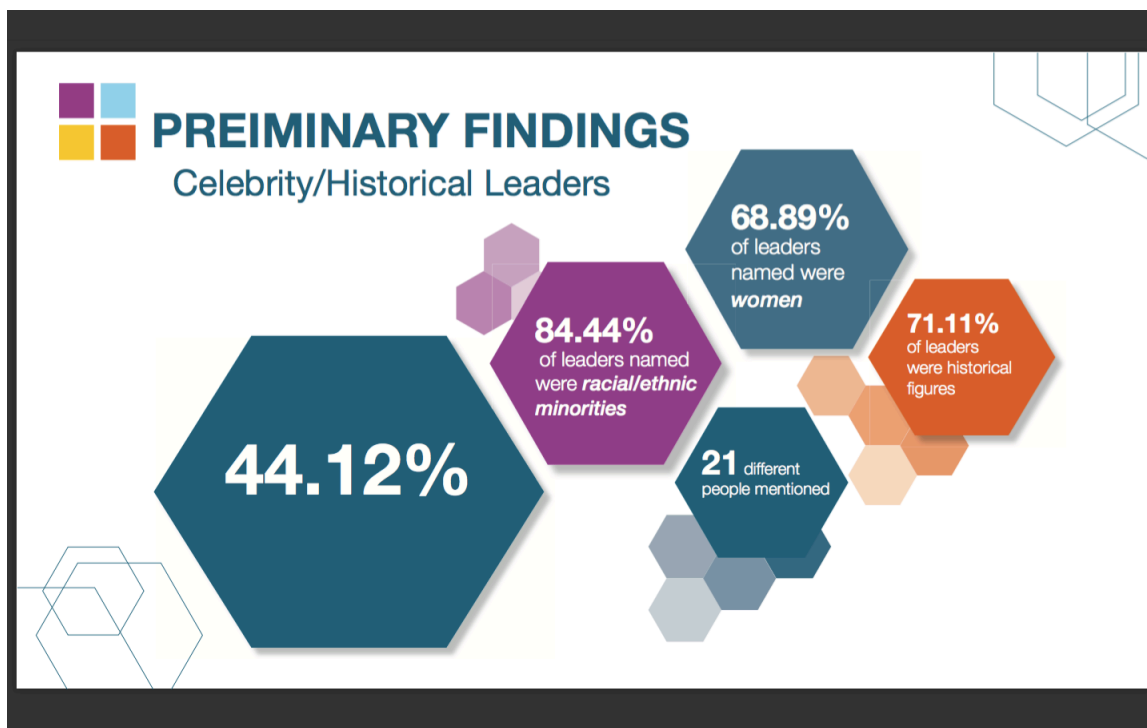
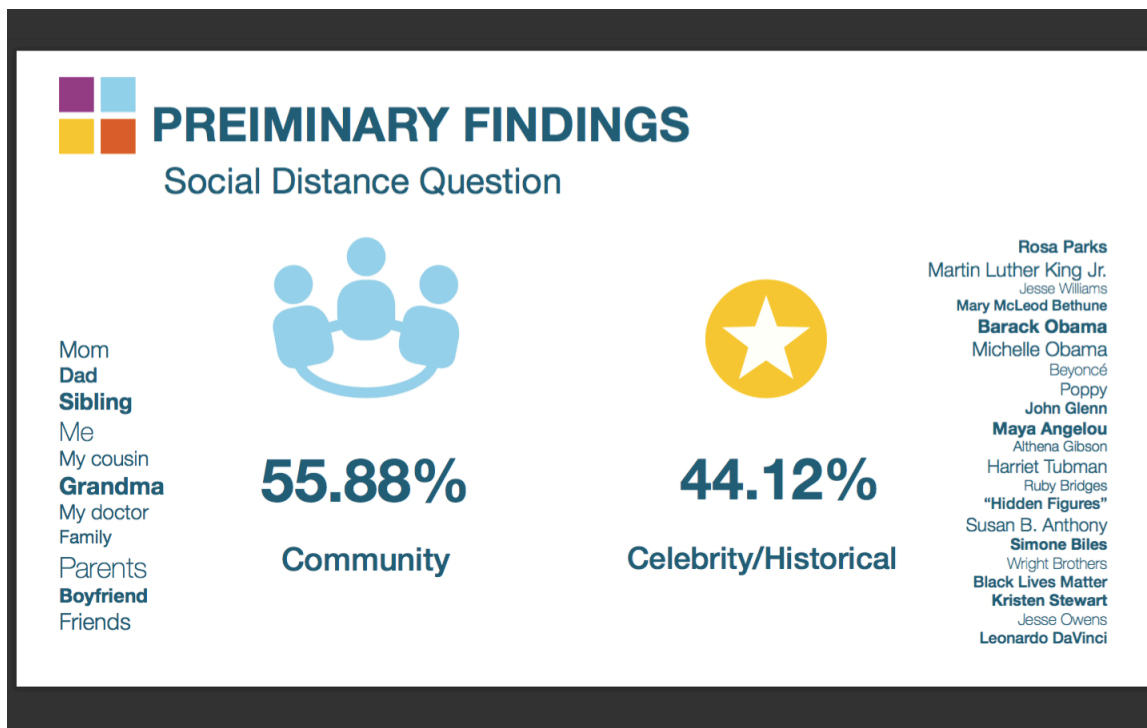
Girls of color already see themselves as leaders. This is evidenced by the answers they gave when asked about the characteristics they associate with girls of color. After noting that girls of color meant different skin tones, the words girls used to describe girls of color were words like smart, brave, strong, unique and confident. This is positive. It means that there is something/someone in their lives that makes them associate their identity with leadership qualities. The next step is to figure out where they are learning this attitude from, and once that information is revealed applying that to leadership programs to make sure all girls of color are seeing themselves in a leadership capacity. A

further research question could be, “Who is one person who tells you that you are a leader?” and a follow up to that, “Do you believe them? Why or why not?”.

The claims made in this paper about girls of color contribute to the body of research by highlighting the importance of shared demographic markers. Girls of color seek out role models that they can see themselves in. The research shows that these leaders can be community in nature or they can be celebrity/historical in nature. This data allows for us to expand our definition of what a role model can be. Leadership programs are not able to meet the needs of girls of color because there are not enough studies that take data directly from girls of color. The solution is simple; we need more research on how girls of color view leaders. Once we have that data we can begin to build the next generation of leaders, one that includes all girls.

Appendix





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